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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KCOR](#) [XA](#) [XY](#) [GH](#)
SUBJECT: GHANAIAN PRESIDENT ADDRESSES ETHICS BUT CAUSES
POLITICAL CONTROVERSY

REF: ACCRA 41

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President John Evans Atta Mills has made restoring trust in the public sector a priority of his new administration. Mills, a former law professor, is thought to be a decent man who "does the right thing". He has consistently said that he will not engage in a political "witch hunt" but that he will not tolerate corruption. In the first five months of his tenure, Mills has set the tone for public vigilance on graft and self enrichment by enforcing asset declaration regulations and reclaiming cars, furniture, and other assets either taken or "purchased" by outgoing politicians in sweetheart deals. Although Post believes these are positive steps, his actions are being portrayed as political score settling by many of his New Patriotic Party (NPP) opponents. Most of the moves have not generated unhappiness on the part of the public at large, and Mills's credibility has been boosted by the suspension of Minister for Youth and Sports Alhaji Mohammed Muntaka Mubarak while allegations of corruption are investigated. Media reports indicate that former President Kufour moved out of his state-owned office on June 5, 2009, although there are no indications that Kufour is being accused of improprieties.
END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Following his inauguration in January 2009, Mills made clear his intent to address corruption in the public sector. When swearing in his Cabinet, President Mills warned the new Ministers that any officials who believe that they have a right to exploit their offices for personal gain should remove themselves from government. He mandated that all government appointees comply with the constitutional requirement to complete an Asset Declaration form and introduced legislation permitting the Attorney General to make public all declared assets. Currently, declared assets are submitted to the Attorney General in sealed envelopes. The legislation is currently before Parliament.

¶3. (U) Early in his administration, Mills placed on hold and asked for a review of the decision of his immediate predecessor to reward former members of the Executive and Legislators with substantial bonuses when they left office. He insisted on the return of one million Ghana cedis (close to \$1million at the time of purchase) worth of luxury furnishings and fittings removed by the former Speaker of Parliament from his official residence and the return (with reimbursement) of automobiles and other property purchased by former officials at artificially low prices. Former Chief of Staff to President Kufour and Minister for Presidential Affairs, Kwodwo Mpiani, was brought in to the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) reportedly to be questioned about financial improprieties in the "Ghana@50" celebration. Mills's actions are being portrayed by NPP leaders as political score settling. Although Post does not believe this is the case, the waters are muddied by the fact that many of those around Mills would like to respond in kind to what they view as abuses by the Kufour government. So far, however, the public at large, including NPP supporters, does not seem to be particularly outraged at seeing politicians forced to return cars and high value goods to the government.

14. (C) President Mills's credibility was bolstered by his aggressive action against Minister for Youth and Sports Mohammed Mubarak, who is accused of financial malfeasance involving expenses made on behalf of the national football (soccer) team. FSN Political Specialist was told by a government Minister (protect) that when the allegations surfaced, the President wanted the Minister arrested but was dissuaded by the BNI. The President heard the Minister's defense but was not convinced and asked for a written explanation of the charges. When still not convinced by the Minister's written statement, Mills put him on leave pending the outcome of the investigation. Mills is sticking to his guns even under pressure from his own party. A Muslim leader from Kumasi told Poloff that he had urged the Vice President to "forgive" Mubarak, noting that "to err is human" and that "this is his first time." He said that the Vice President replied that "the case must be allowed to run its course," implying that he would not intervene.

15. (C) In a possibly related incident, the media reported that former President Kufour on June 5, 2009, vacated the government-owned building he has been using as an office. The former President's occupation of the bungalow had engendered public debate and accusations that he had taken national property without following procedures. The local Ga ethnic group threatened action on the basis that all of Accra is "Ga Land." In April, President Mills told the Ambassador that the office issue had essentially become a non-issue once it became clear that Kufour was not asserting ownership of the property. Given Mills's statement, if Kufour was forced out of the office, it may indicate that it was done without Mills's knowledge. On June 17, President Kufour told the

Ambassador that he had been asked to move out of the office and that he had done so. He insisted that there was no impropriety on his part (and we believe him). He noted that it is customary and legal for former Presidents to be provided with an office and he is waiting for Parliament to identify and approve a replacement.

16. (U) COMMENT: President Mill's personal integrity is unquestioned. The question is whether or not he can convince those around him to follow his example. Mills has demonstrated his willingness to investigate malfeasance by members of his own NDC party as those as the opposition. But despite Mills's best efforts, he may be unable to stop government officials from viewing the next four years as their rightful turn to enrich themselves at public expense. Post is concerned about the removal of Kufour from his office. Although it appears to be legal, the Ambassador has previously urged senior National Democratic Congress (NDC) officials to treat Kufour with the dignity and respect that a democratically elected former president (who urged his own party to accept its electoral loss) deserves. END COMMENT
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